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THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
PUBLIC DUTIES  
OF  
PRIVATE LIFE;

WITH REFERENCE TO  
PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES  
AND OPINIONS.

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## ADVERTISEMENT,

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**I**N general the presumption is, that an Author is very much in earnest in all that he publishes to the world ; and the contrary must be proved. But when an Essay which, for its subject, might come from the Pulpit, is seen to issue from the *Temple*, the presumption may possibly be thought to lean the other way. The truth however is, that I am here but giving to the Public those reflections which for some time I have not been able to refrain from pressing forward in conversation ; even with persons who stood very little in need of such suggestions.

What I offer is but a trifle ; and will not be found to contain any thing substantially

stantially new. But in these days of cold and pedantic arrogance of thinking, it is not possible too often, or in too many forms of expression and application, to do justice to those fixed and honourable *feelings* of duty, which are the very cement of society, and the only true guard of a man's conduct.

TEMPLE,  
Jan. 1795.



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THOUGHTS  
ON THE  
PUBLIC DUTIES  
OF  
PRIVATE LIFE.

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THE private conduct of every individual is at present of immediate importance to the country. Its operation is not only certain, as it ever must be, but presents itself sensibly and directly to the observation. The peculiar aspect of foreign affairs ; the defection of allies ; the triumphs of a savage and unprincipled enemy ; the total overthrow of those laws which formed, of common consent, a code among nations ; and the utter destruction of all political balance in Europe,

compel us at last to turn our eyes inwards, in quest of that security and relief which the resources of our own character and circumstances may afford. Thank Heaven, it is yet no uncomfortable prospect—The People are composed of excellent ingredients, and Nature has been bountiful in the blessings she spreads before us. We have only to use them well. We must at length be œconomists in private manners; and not indulge in that proud or lazy inattention to apparent trifles which accumulates a load of mischief upon the public. Let our national attachments; our old peculiarities of sentiment; our respect for a free and manly subordination; our *honest* prejudices—let all of them be cherished and preserved, and Britain shall yet stand firm. These are the rocks on which she rests. While they remain, the waves that dash against her will only prove her strength.

The security of every state must ultimately depend on the opinions and principles of

private men. The rest is form. If prevailing opinions are in their nature productive of a love of order, humanity, and domestic virtue, a defect of form in the exterior arrangement of things will little affect the general welfare. But if they tend to that libertinism of mind which destroys all constancy of sentiment among the people, the full perfection of political form will give but the semblance of security. It is a vain distinction which imputes different principles of prosperity to different forms of government; for all of those principles are no more than different names for individual virtue.

The formation of opinions is therefore the first movement of general good or evil: and opinion is formed in private society. No laws or rules of government will ever controul it. Even reason is possessed of no absolute or exclusive sovereignty over it. The mind of the majority is only to be reached by the influence of respect, or the force of habit.—This is no calumny on human cha-

rafter—The purposes of cultivated life require that much the greater part of the community shall be employed in such occupations as are totally inconsistent with extensive views, or the exercise of good reasoning on general subjects. It is but a very small portion of knowledge which they can possibly acquire on topics of civil or political difficulty : and a small portion of knowledge on such topics may destroy the industry, the honesty, and the happiness of the individual, but never can lead to public improvement. The popular mind, I repeat, is to be regulated by general impressions ; and all that is virtuous in the great mass of society is the effect of attachment, gratitude, imitation, and a generous *habit* of thinking. Hence that noble jurisdiction over manners which every good man enjoys—that authority, derived from Heaven, which acts on the affections with the mild and gentle sway of nature for the purposes of social happiness : an authority which is not confined to the rich or the great, but belongs in a certain degree to every individual whose

whose character entitles him to respect. The power of extending the sphere and effect of this amiable influence is indeed the best privilege of talents, rank, or riches. The neglect of that power is dishonourable; the abuse, supremely infamous.

The support of all settled opinions and habits of thinking which lead to the practice of private virtue is, of course, the first object of this influence: and yet it seems strange that the regard which every man must feel for the ease and comfort of his own mind should not of itself protect him from the danger of deserting such established principles. For he who does desert them is neither free nor happy. From that moment he is adrift upon an ocean of uncertainty. His ideas, even respecting the great duties of life, are dependent on the jarring theories of others; and what he holds to be right to-day, may be logically proved to be wrong to-morrow. A skilful sophist shall drive him through the world before him; and frame a new argument

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at pleasure, to justify the mean or wicked project of the moment. He is lost and forlorn. He has dismissed those old and faithful monitors who taught him to *feel* what was right ; and seeks in vain for that repose of mind which he formerly enjoyed in their constant and uniform direction.

But the effects of his emancipation are not confined to himself. His engagements have no stability. His fulfilment of an obligation never amounts to fidelity. There is nothing reciprocal in his transactions with the man of principle. For the one cannot give that security which the other is not able to withhold.

The sentiments and opinions of every man are, in truth, the essentials of his character. His actions may be fair, because fraud is full of hazard : but if the turn and scope of his thoughts and reflections are adverse or indifferent to the practice of established duties, the character of the man is intrinsically bad.

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He cannot be the friend, and may, by a diligent communication of his sentiments, be the active enemy of the society in which he lives—And such is the man who doubts, or disputes the existence of a moral sense; lectures perpetually against prejudice; and calls triumphantly for a definition of virtue. The conclusion of all his deductions amounts necessarily to this, that principle is but another name for prejudice, and convenience the only rational determination of conduct.

But this is the very vice of the present day. Every age and period of time has some prevailing fashion or prominent feature of folly, and an extreme *liberality of sentiment* is now the reigning affectation. The worst of prejudices and most intolerant bigotry are propagated or concealed under that pestilent mischief. With some, it is the creature of mere weakness and vanity. With others, the cover, or the instrument of their wickedness. Of the former description there are many who truly believe that they are men of a superior  
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range of thinking, and hold themselves obliged "*for the sake of truth*" to exert their whole might in the propagation of their own conceits upon all sorts of subjects. Their education, habits, and information are forgotten. It matters not what they have been, or what in reality they are. They have acquired, as if by intuition, in a day or a year, what others, with all advantages, find it difficult to arrive at in the course of a life-time. This class of new-born philosophers is composed of persons of all ages, from the school-boy who plays with the principles of men, to the grey-headed student who discovers from his books that he is acquainted with the world. —The school-boy may recover ;—experience and observation may banish the abstractions he has been taught. But the aged or adult Quixot of *liberal sentiment* is confirmed by opposition, and looks down upon the danger of defeat. His zeal "*in the defence of truth,*" (that is, the obstinacy of his conceit,) is proportioned to the novelty of his knowledge. And if it happen that he is one of those



these “grown gentlemen” taught suddenly to be wise, who infest the world with the letters they have learnt in their later years, his case is desperate and incurable. There are others of the above general description who are sufficiently apprised of their own ignorance and incapacity, but hope to impose upon the world by a diligent expression of contempt for all common ideas. And their industry is seldom in vain. For the ease with which the weakest man that breathes (if practised in the terms of abstract talk) may run out an argument, or string together a set of ready-made sentences which shall catch the vulgar ear, and please the croud with the novelty of the sound, is obvious to all who have ever been accustomed to observe the trick of such practices.

But the labours of the ignorant and the weak would soon be overthrown if, unhappily, they were not supported by learned or able men, who goad them to the contest, and furnish them by their writings with such weapons as they can wield. Of this latter description

there are some who are mere adventurers for the fame of genius, and the chance of consequence in the ferment of general disorder. But many are impelled by the dread of labour or of famine, more than the love of fame ; and write what will immediately procure them idleness and a dinner.—Indeed, the increasing multitude of literary mercenaries, through all their different ranks and degrees of prostitution, who, for the basest purposes, let out to hire those faculties of the soul, with which nature has ennobled man, is a lamentable proof of that depravity of mind which gains so fast upon the world. For where shall we look for the pure integrity of the heart ; the independence of simple manners ; the moderation of true philosophy, when they have left the silent and studious abodes of the learned ? It is a vulgar extravagance of expence, or a mean impatience of temporary inconvenience, under the disappointment of unreasonable expectations, which often thus degrades the man of letters, and deprives him of all pretensions to honourable patronage—

to that generous encouragement and support which justly ranks among the best and fairest objects of munificence.

There are also men of abilities who are mischievous from the mere workings of ill-humour; who care little about what *shall* be, but are ever dissatisfied with what *is*. Such are the peevish querulists who procure ease to themselves by discharging their bile upon others. They have no settled purpose of doing wrong; and only seek for relief from the humour which disturbs them: but the matter they discharge is too acrid to be harmless.—Others again there are, who roam about at large in the full madness of political metaphysics. Such men overleap at one bound, all that belongs to present possessions and enjoyment, and wanton in the idea of practising experiments on the body of the people, for the improvement of the world in the art of government. With them it is virtue to devote existing millions to the hazard of misery, in the purchase of a chance for some imaginary good to posterity.

—Still another class remains, composed of men who become the active instruments of bad ambition in others, while their own object extends no farther than immediate gratification. But such is the character of those men's passions; so purely malignant and depraved, that their numbers cannot, in the course of nature, be great. Such men would enjoy the devastation of society, even without a prospect of direct or positive advantage to themselves. Their hearts are bloated with that rankling poison which blasts all the sympathies of nature. Their pride is a hatred of whatever is excellent in others; an intolerance of good; and the appetite of fiends for the downfall of the prosperous.—For purposes to us inscrutable, the great Author of all things has infused such baneful qualities into the hearts of some of his creatures. With reverence we may conjecture that it was to stimulate caution, prevent arrogance of mind, and give contrast and energy to the practice of virtue in others. But all our theories

ries on such subjects serve at last, but to shew the narrow limits of human capacity. We know as little of the great scheme of Providence, in the formation and government of the universe, as did the insect on the cupola of *St. Peter's* of the edifice on which it crawled. Like the insect, we have our little horizon which marks the petty sphere of all our actions: and there we may contemplate enough to be impressed with some idea of our own insignificance in the scale of those stupendous wonders which every where surround us. Yet we are proud and envious—The worm swells with anger at the greatness of its neighbour!

By the agency and insensible co-operation of all those various characters of weakness or of vice, the profligate and ambitious move onward in the progress of their designs upon the people: and eventually they must succeed, if *other men and manners* do not counteract them. The national character is not invulnerable;

nerable ; and the minds of the best and most moral people upon earth may be changed by the gradual introduction of foreign fashions. There never was a time when the broad and gross audacity of that licentiousness which now assails the creed of religion, and the loyalty of honour, would have met with encouragement in any part of this island. That temporary intoxication which maddened the whole court of *Charles* the Second into a spirit of opposition to all that was regular in manners, was no more than a wild effusion of their contempt for the prudery of those affectations which had so long oppressed them. It affected but a few ; never reached the principles of the people ; and soon subsided and was lost in the sober sense and decency of demeanour which have hitherto in general distinguished the private character of England. The evil which prevails at present is totally different ; and far more dangerous than all that mere levity can ever produce. It is now the mode to examine with scrupulous and distrustful concern the theory, and not the effects,



effects, of all settled and well-received doctrines. They are tried by the test of artificial conclusions, drawn from assumed premises; and not by that of experience, or general acquiescence. The merit of discovering a flaw, or what may be made to appear as an inconsistency or contradiction, is estimated according to the dignity of the subject attacked: and the character of genius, strength of mind, independence of spirit, and the like, is the reward of the fortunate adventurer. The fashion gets suddenly to a height, which the wildest imagination could hardly have anticipated. The existence of a Deity, whose infinite power, unbounded goodness, and incomprehensible nature, have at all periods of time, in all parts of the world, and under every form of devotion, been the objects of awe, of adoration, and of gratitude, is openly and triumphantly arraigned as the chimera of savage fear and barbarous superstition. This is indeed the flight of those braver spirits who despise that reserve with which it has heretofore been thought decent to veil over

such detestable affectations of infidelity. Some, of less daring impiety, are contented with the fame of having seen through the stale imposture of revealed religion; and the hardihood of expressing, in fearless terms, their wonder at its long continued influence. Others, with distinguished moderation, confine the effect of their genius and discernment to the correction of certain parts of the system of christianity which the purest protestantism has long considered as essential to its existence. They attack it in detail: and as this class of philosophers are violent in their professions of attachment to religion in general, exactly in proportion to their consciousness of a desire to overturn it, they are not afraid (under the shelter of such professions) of publishing to the world the result of their laborious inquiries. This they do in works of great length, and didactic solemnity, or artful familiarity of composition. But the substance of the whole is this; that the people have long been deceived in some of the leading doctrines of that religion which directs and controls



trouls their conduct. They are assured, in particular, that the faith which all established churches have maintained respecting the nature of the Godhead, and the true character of our Saviour, is most grossly erroneous. The former they maintain to be, in every sense, one and undivided, simple and without mystery. The latter, they demonstrate to be altogether human. As to the scriptures, there are *reverend* doctors to point out, with exact precision, those parts of them (hitherto in general held to be divine) which are plainly, as they assert, the work of uninspired men\*. Thus religion is divested of all its influence over the minds of those who stand most in need of it; and sufficient preparation is made for the destruction of every fixed and settled rule of conduct among the people. There are others who exercise their industry, in earning the character of superior thinking, by expressing their hearty contempt for certain distinctions of rank and station which

\* Some curious examples of this might be given from late publications.

have grown with the growth of society, and are as old, in their principles, as the first formation of the world. They laugh to scorn every idea of that fine and delicate morality which inculcates all the precepts of honour, and secures the best decencies of life by the laws of an elevated sentiment. They affect to think it derogatory from the character of common honesty, that it should ever be held to make *but a part* of those duties which are necessary for the preservation and support of social happiness; and are offended at the privileges of that superiority which adds the habits of a gentleman to the ordinary obligations of law. They proceed; and do their best to withdraw all respect from affections which Nature would seem to have intended as the primary laws of society. The love of our country; an attachment to our native soil; that sweet and delightful attraction, which, in the language of a nation of scientific savages, is denominated a disease\*, even Englishmen are not now ashamed to consider as something

\* *Maladie du pays.*

too low and unphilosophical for modern enlargement of opinion. It is, at the best, they maintain, but a local prejudice; a blind preference, in a thousand instances, of the worse for the better; a mere mechanical bias in favour of an insensible object; of a field, a mountain, or a rock; a desire to exist in a particular spot, for no better reason than because we ourselves, or some of our family, have existed there before. And that we should ever give way to a partiality which induces the belief that we possess better qualities, as a people, than the inhabitants of neighbouring countries, is, to those men of liberality, at this advanced age of the world, matter of wonder and regret. "The heart," they maintain, on the authority of a poetical expression, "the heart is a citizen of the world:" and all distinctions inconsistent with that noble extension of principle; that great and general philanthropy, which ranges over the universe at large, and delights in remote and distant objects of humanity, while near and familiar evils escape all observation, are un-

worthy of civilized and scientific man. From country to family the transition is necessary and immediate. It is impossible, by any regular demonstration, to prove that a son should bear a greater affection for his parent than for any other person ; or that kindred have, as such, any pretensions to regard. And with some, who find it impossible entirely to lose the man in the philosopher, this becomes even the object of affectation—with others it is a lesson of easy execution : for it accords too well with the frigid mechanism of hard nerved men, who thus contrive to find their account in the deficiencies of their frame ; and pretend to a certain greatness of character which cannot stoop to the puling tenderneſſes of domestic affection.

A man thus stripped of all veneration and gratitude for the goodness of that Almighty Being who has made and upholds the universe ; of all respect for a religion of gentleness and peace ; of all fixed and determined sense of honourable duty ; of all regard for  
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the salutary distinctions of subordination ; of all attachment to country ; of all private and domestic affection——What is he ?—A selfish, solitary, and brutal savage : A wretch, who stands alone in the midst of his fellow-creatures ; without heart-strings to connect him with any thing in creation : a blind and presumptuous outcast, to whom the world is yet a chasm ; and mankind, the worst of all animated beings.

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It is difficult to conceive that many instances can exist of characters so completely devoid of all principle or attachment as that which I have just described : but, such is the state of modern *liberality*, that I fear they are not rare. It is true that some of these prejudices against old-established opinions and principles, are much less productive of vicious and immoral conduct than others. There are some of them which do not so much as others unhinge the whole frame of the mind ; and  
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it is not to be doubted that there are many examples of men of general good conduct, who have nevertheless given way to *some* of those opinions in speculation. To others of them it is utterly impossible that any good man can ever suffer his mind to give admission. Infirmary of understanding is, in the eye of charity, a sufficient justification, wherever the moral tendency of an opinion is matter of doubt or difficulty. But where it is manifest as the day, that much harm may be the consequence of a speculation; and, at the best, extremely questionable whether any solid benefit can ever be derived from it, the man who persists in promoting its circulation and effect, is answerable for the mischief it may produce. At that moment he is sapping the foundation of private happiness; robbing others of the comforts they have long enjoyed; and bequeathing to posterity a store of evil which no imagination can calculate: all for the gratification of a perverse temper; or extravagant and presumptuous vanity.

—Let us try, more at large, the practical merits of those opinions which have been mentioned.—

The conviction which impresses itself so deeply on every mind of sensibility and reflection, that a great and beneficent Intelligence presides over the affairs of the universe, in a manner incomprehensible, but with effects proportioned to Almighty power, is the first source of all order and discipline of sentiment, or of thought among men. The idea of an Omnipotent Deity, as just as he is merciful ; of an invisible controul which penetrates the inward recesses of the soul, gives a temper to the heart which precedes the operation of all human institutions. It mixes with the first suggestions of the mind, and shapes their general course and direction. It prevents what human laws would never cure ; and punishes by alarms, which no artifice can allay. The boldest reprobate that dares the detestation, or the justice of the world, will sometimes start at the passing thought of an avenging



avenging Providence: while the good man marks the hand of heaven in the hour of misfortune, inflicting chastisement for offences which the world never knew, but the righteousness of his heart suggests as the cause of his sufferings. He bends with resignation; and feels all the consciousness of that consoling penitence which rests upon a determined purpose to amend. And where is the man whose virtue is too pure for improvement; whose vices are too venial for repentance? —A spirit of devotion is the first impulse of nature. It rises imperceptibly in the heart, and gives exercise to the best and noblest feelings of humanity. It is hardly to be subdued even by the cold insensibility of vicious habits. For who that retains the shape of man has never felt the swell of gratitude to heaven for some unlooked-for relief; some propitious, or happy event, beyond the course of common occurrence? The sudden ejaculation of thanksgiving is the worship of the heart;—that praise which springs spontaneously from the  
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very bottom of the soul; and gives evidence, with the voice of nature, against the insolent and presumptuous infidel. How sweet the sense of gratitude! How delightful that confidence which is inspired by a belief that the Creator of the universe is the guardian and protector of every upright man: that all is for the best; and partial evil but the proof of virtue; or the means of that system of general good which governs the world!—I thank not the man who would persuade me that all this is the illusion of a weak or sanguine fancy.—“*Si in hoc erro, libenter erro: Nec mihi hunc errorem, quo delector, dum vivo extorqueri volo.*”

It is not with a purpose of better service to the interests of happiness, that men, endowed with the common faculties of reason, are as earnest in their endeavours to supplant the influence of revealed religion, as a good man would be to eradicate principles of manifest hostility to morality and justice. Those

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preachers of “moderatism” in impiety, maintain that the system they attack has no connection whatever with natural theology.—They *say* they are not Atheists—But such is the tendency of their doubts ; so contemptuous is the disregard they avowedly express for all that the best and wisest men have now for many ages held forward to the people as a sacred emanation from heaven, that it is difficult to give perfect credit to the distinction they assume. There are assuredly gradations in the progress of infidelity. But he who is profligate enough to *inculcate* ideas so destructive of that salutary controul which gives order and consistency to the minds of the many who form the great mass of society, is entitled to no favour in estimating the extent of his sincerity. Nor is it uncharitable to suspect that most of those who labour assiduously to overthrow certain tenets which have long been held essential to Christianity, are labouring, in truth, to root up the system.—My argument on this whole matter is short—

It is impossible to imagine any one good object to be attained by all the pains and industry which are employed in such adverse discussions. The moral man can have no excuse whatever for his labours. For where is the precept or the doctrine of Christianity which is not favourable to morality? What virtue does it not enforce? What vice does it encourage? Even the decencies, the comforts, and mutual accommodations of social life, are supported and advanced by its gentle spirit and benignant influence.

And where is the security with which those men of modern illumination, those petty philosophers \*, propose to replace that impulse or restraint which now acts upon the great body of the people? Or what is to be substituted for the sacred obligation of an oath when religion is abolished; or its leading doctrines are stamped with the character of folly? Perhaps the answer may be, that a regard for reputation, or love of justice is sufficient; and

\* *Minuti philosophi.*

Cic.

that he who is not bound by the engagement of his word, will never hesitate to break loose from the fetters of an oath. The man who can seriously reason thus, would do well to look a little into the world.

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It happens with the libertine in sentiment, as in the practice of life, that the overthrow of the greater principle is the destruction of the lesser—the shock which shakes the foundation must loosen every stone in the building. When a system which has long been regarded as the first great source of morality is received with ridicule, or becomes publicly the subject even of doubt, the road is open to the utmost stretch of restless investigation. The whole structure of society is then the subject of wild and extravagant discussion.

Those distinctions of rank which preserve the civil discipline of subordination, and that elevated sensibility of mind which belongs to the

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the true character of *gentleman*, are, next to religion, the best guards of social virtue; and yet on all sides they are exposed to the insults of every marauder who “hangs loose upon society,” and affects to wear the uniform of a philosopher. Too often (I must say it with sorrow) are the bearers of such honourable distinctions seen to desert their station, and give countenance to the bitterest enemies of their rank.—But I wave such reflections for the present—I am first to speak of their proper character and duty—to consider the true nature and effect of those privileges they possess. In doing so, I shall not certainly lessen the indignation which is due to their abuse.

The ideas which suggest themselves to the mind, in thinking with attention on this familiar subject, are founded on simple principles. They are supported by the evidence of a record which is to be found in the heart of every honourable man. It is an axiom in moral œconomy, that every right has its duty—every privilege its corresponding obligation—  
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whatever confers respect, exacts responsibility. It follows, that all distinctions which place men on an eminence, and invest them with superiority, are inventions in aid of the best qualities of nature. They enlarge the operation, and meliorate the dispositions of humanity. They direct even the weaknesses of man to the good of society; and mark out a scale of virtue infinitely more extensive than that which the mere necessities of life could ever suggest. All the duties of integrity are enriched by a certain generosity of character, which secure them against temptations too weak for the just pride of a gentleman; but, in general, much too strong for the resistance of ordinary habits, or common honesty.

But the ceremonial of artificial distinction will never *of itself* be productive of that superior character. I have only said that such distinctions are inventions in aid of the qualities of nature. It is indeed a truth too notorious, that some men are born with a cast and turn of mind so essentially wicked, so en-  
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tirely perverse and dishonest, or wretchedly sordid and low, that all the care of education, the influence of virtuous example, or the incitements of rank, can at the utmost do no more than diminish the effect of so much constitutional evil: while true nobility of mind is often seen to shine forth from the humblest and deepest obscurity.

The character of *gentleman*, as it is founded in nature, must of course exist in different modes and forms, and in various degrees, in all the civilized nations of the world. But there are circumstances in the manners, situation, and government of Great Britain which are peculiarly favourable to its perfect and complete formation. The very word announces the amiable cast of those qualities which our language ascribes to the idea. We are habituated to a due respect for birth and station. The whole tenor of our manners expresses it; and the form and practice of our laws acknowledge it. But our respect is limited, just, and rational. It supplants no substantial



substantial right, and bereaves no man of his comfort. It warrants no instance of oppression or of insolence. It is, on the contrary, a perpetual admonition, which calls for the practice of a mild deportment and distinguished morality. It takes nothing from the giver, and improves the person to whom it is given. It is the spontaneous unconstrained effect of that temperate and well-ordered freedom ; that independence of person, and equality of right ; that chearful and voluntary acquiescence in the sacrifice of little passions to the great duties of subordination, which compose or distinguish the structure of British liberty.—Our loyalty is the dignified obedience of attachment. Our laws are venerable for their origin ; and supreme in their authority.—Our Church is privileged for the encouragement of a salutary uniformity ; but not supported by intolerance. The forms of our worship are equally remote from the disgusting austerity of puritanical pride, and the presumptuous absurdity of that system which hides and obscures, while it affects to adorn and improve,  
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the pure and simple precepts of Christianity. Our minds are neither hardened by the suppression of that pious gratitude which nature has inculcated as the very essence of devotion, (but which would soon cease to be felt if it ceased to be expressed,) nor bent down into stupidity by the weight of superstitions which dishonour the Deity, and encourage the wicked. Our endowments for the culture of literature are extensive. Our learned professions are honourable in their rank, and liberally productive of celebrated character. The spirit of our industry is great and enlarged. We are enriched by commercial enterprize; and “our merchants are princes.” But yet, happily, we are not absorbed in commerce. The love of gain is not the sole motive of our exertions. We have a great and dignified court: a well-constituted nobility: a rich and independent landed interest. And every individual of all those various bodies of men, through their several gradations from the sovereign downwards, is justly proud of possessing the rank and title of a British gentleman.

There is a point of union in this common quality, connecting all that is liberal in the different classes of society, which is not to be found in any other part of the world. In countries where birth is almost the only title to that distinction, the true character can never be produced. It is an arrogant and exclusive privilege, which generates insolence in superiors, and a base unwilling submission in those who are compelled to bow to them. Both descriptions of men are there equally depraved by the distinction. In a country where the court is but a camp, and the whole kingdom no more than a standing army, it hardly ever can exist: for there the human *mind* is suppressed, and a gross multitude of machines is all that remains. The military profession has there but little of that gallantry of soul, that spring of honour which raises the soldier of a free country above the sordid cares and apprehensions of ordinary life\*.

\* I say the *sordid* cares—for the mistake is ruinous to military character when it is thought (as many a pretty subaltern imagines) that the soldier's profession exempts him from the attentions of discretion, the decencies of good morals, or the  
trouble

In a country of *mere* merchants the situation of things indeed is extremely different; but the result, as to the character of gentleman, is nearly the same. There is as little room for the growth and exercise of a generous nature in the one country as in the other. In the latter, the habits and interests of the whole people are against it. They are all completely occupied in the unceasing pursuit of one little object. The means are mistaken for the end. The love of money takes possession of the whole soul. It palsies all its powers; and establishes an absolute dominion on the incapacity it has produced. The virtues of such a people have no higher amount than that species of honesty which fulfils a legal obligation; the diligence of greedy minds; and the frugality which saves for the barren pleasures of avarice.

trouble of serious thought and studious reflection. Every ensign, with the colours in his hand, should think of the general's baton; with that extensive science, that prompt and vigorous exercise of mind, that accuracy of minute attention, that correct humanity, and all those various virtues and accomplishments which are necessary to support it. In particular, let him remember that the gratification of a *mercenary* spirit is, truly and literally, monstrous in a soldier.

In a country constructed as Great Britain is, with a mixed formation of internal society, as well as of government: composed of all the ingredients which are to be found in the civilized world; the various classes of men who, from birth or station, are possessed of the rank of gentleman, are extremely numerous; and enjoy the full benefit of mutual and familiar intercourse. The nature and modes of that intercourse are indeed affected, (and rightly so affected,) in a considerable degree, by the several ranks which they hold: yet not so as to preclude that intimacy which cannot but accompany strong personal attachment. With men of sense and some knowledge of the world it is not difficult (with all others it is impossible) to be easy, communicative, and correctly free, without descending from station on the one hand, or encroaching upon place or pre-eminence on the other. We are here reciprocally improved by those habits of intimacy among men of different ranks and situations, (within the general description I have mentioned,) which are perfectly

fectly consistent with every useful distinction. They are more likely to have surveyed many objects through different media, or from different points of view, than if they stood upon the same level in life. They inform one another; and a certain delicacy of restraint insensibly softens and civilizes the manners of both—a restraint which aids the effect of all rational conversation, by regulating the expression, without impeding the course of reflection: and whatever tends to regulate the manner, gives order and correctness to the thoughts. This is no matter of indifference to the interests of morality. It is not necessary, for the purpose of propagating promiscuous opinions with effect, that volumes, or paragraphs, or set speeches shall issue from the person who is active in promoting their success. The poison is better infused in conversation. The hour of conviviality is a season of confidence; the pores of the heart are open, and the mind is relaxed. Unfortunately it happens that an insinuating species of familiar eloquence, and all that amounts

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to a flimsy but engaging address, are frequently attached to loose-minded men of superficial talents. Such swindlers in conversation, who are dextrous in the management of trick and “false tokens,” to cheat men’s minds of a property which the statutes could not describe, derive all their credit from the superiority they acquire over the ridiculous affectations of some, and the repulsive demeanor of others. There are coxcombs, whose smooth and lulling vapidness of manner, too fine for ordinary animation, are vain of an exemption from all natural emotion. With them the eye is too indolent to seem quite awake; the voice too faint for perfect or articulate utterance. All vigour they hold to be vulgarism; and intelligence implies an exertion, which forfeits every pretension to the honors of high-fashioned apathy. This preposterous affectation is contrasted with that intrusive and disgusting spirit of disputation which knows no distinction of time, place, or occasion; but draws down the miseries of perpetual and unprofitable discussion on all who are unfortunately



nately within its reach. Those who are possessed with this spirit have probably been led by some accidental or imaginary triumph to conceive that their talent of demonstration is invincible: and they *exhibit* accordingly. It is true there have been men whose wonderful powers of mind have charmed and instructed, while they trampled upon all who dared to doubt; even for the purpose of understanding. The most captivating eloquence has been seen united with pedantic formality. But Dr. Samuel Johnson seldom condescended to argue. He dictated: and always imperiously; yet often delightfully. He spoke in thunder, while he inculcated the mildest duties of benevolence and morality; and those who, pitying the personal weaknesses of the man, remarked the striking inconsistency and imperfection of human nature, were yet lost in wonder at the stupendous force of his intellect, and astonishing extent of his observation—His imitators are the lowest and worst of mimics. There are literary ruffians who now think themselves authorized by great example



ample to be rude. They mistake that hardness of mind which constitutes impudence, for power and vigour of understanding; and from the fastidiousness of a conceited malevolence they expect to derive all the privileges of acknowledged superiority. But this deportment is not confined to the envious or malevolent. A cold and unamiable severity of manners too frequently counteracts or conceals all that is attractive in virtue—a sour and churlish contempt of that which in the eye of judgment is folly, deprives judgment of half its influence. The foe is slighted, and overcomes.—Much scope then there is for the honourable exertion of every man who is endowed with the powers, and possessed of those habits which engage the attention, in the ordinary intercourse of liberal society.

To return from this digression—Our ideas, I have said, are in this country favourable, but not irrationally so, to the pretensions of birth. It is not necessary for any practical good purpose to inculcate the opinion which inge-

nuous men, in speculating on the natural history of man, have mentioned, *viz.* that a certain superiority exists in the blood or race of particular individuals which may lie dormant for generations, or be suppressed ; while their descendants are lost in obscurity, or degraded by misconduct ; and again, in the course of time, emerge ; in the same manner as infirmity of intellect, or bodily disease, is known to rise and fall, appear and disappear, without any known principle or cause to account for it : in short, that mental excellence in capacity and temper may be hereditary, as well as mental or corporeal defect ; and that the irregularity of its succession, the different forms and modifications in which it appears, and the manner in which it is influenced by different external circumstances, serve only to confirm the similitude. Without investing the man of birth with this charter of nature in favour of his *title* to be a man of honour, I would only say, that he who thinks himself possessed

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of it \*, is on that account more likely to acquire and deserve the character. He considers himself as one placed on an eminence, and cannot easily refrain from attending to the appearance which he makes in the eyes of those around him, with more anxiety than if in his own estimation he were one of the crowd whose actions are not individually distinguishable. His title, as he conceives, is derived from heaven. His inherent qualities he holds to be higher than those of ordinary men. His understanding may be weak, and the idea he cherishes of his own superiority must in that case delude him into vanities which may be extravagant; or a display of self-importance, which cannot fail to be ridiculous. But the ground-work of his character will not certainly be unsuitable to his own ideas. If he values himself as a gentle-

\* *Sir Philip Sidney* was remarkable for being tenacious of the honour of his blood. Of this Horace Walpole takes notice, in mentioning the answer, among the Sidney papers, to the famous libel called *Leicester's Commonwealth*, in which he says, Sir Philip defends his uncle with great spirit, and that "what had been said in derogation to their *blood* seems to have touched Sir Philip most."

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man, whatever may be the limits of his understanding, his heart will be the better for that impression; and he will hardly feel ungenerously. But the higher the powers and talents of the mind, the more extensive will be the operation of this sentiment. The man who looks back to a long line of honourable ancestry, will know that the claims of society upon his conduct are proportionably enlarged. He will feel that all ordinary incentives to virtue and honour are multiplied in his favour. A train of reflections ensue which acts upon his mind with the united force of inducement and restraint. To leave what we have received in as good a state as that in which we received it, is no more than a sentiment of common honesty. To carry it a little farther—To add something of our own: to withdraw from observation, or memory, some blot or chasm which may possibly have stained or interrupted the line of a distinguished family, by covering it with new honours:—these are objects which the Author of nature

has formed in the mind of man, by the creation of feelings, which cannot otherwise be gratified ; and yet were not created in vain. —But many are less affected by motive than restraint ; and the descendant of high ancestry must know that his misconduct can never take shelter in the dark ; but must be lighted down to future ages by the renown which precedes it. He is at least a bold man who can bear the idea of being marked by all the world as the first vile exception to that honourable character which has long distinguished his family.

On similar principles the first creation of *hereditary* rank must in general improve and elevate the mind of the man who receives it. It gives wings to an honourable fame, which bears down his name to posterity. His heart exults as he views, with that prospective eye which carries forward the human thought and purpose beyond the life of man, the continuation of a distinguished existence in a long line of descendants, who may triumph for ages to come

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in the trophies of his virtue.—And surely it is difficult to conceive how the proudest puritan whose heart ever rankled at the sight of a superior, can deny, that in this there is at least an additional incitement to merit, far greater than that which could arise from the barren possession of a mere personal honour. Indeed, it may be said that a man of well-known merit stands little in need, for himself, of any badge of distinction: and it were therefore far more reasonable, for all practical purposes, to reverse the vulgar proposition, and maintain, that the title of honour should begin in the descendant of him who earned it, rather than be born, uninheritably, by himself.

From the construction of the human mind, it is impossible that descent from honourable ancestry, or the acquisition of high rank, should ever, at any rate, be matter of absolute indifference. It must inevitably produce some effective operation. In general, it will either promote virtue, or restrain vice. And wherever it is insufficient to counteract the low bias

bias of a groveling mind, or the wicked tendencies of a malignant and dishonest nature, it has at least the salutary effect of placing on an elevated pillory, a fit object for the indignant derision or honest detestation of mankind.

And melancholy it is to see how many have placed themselves on this worst of pillories ;— many compared with the few to whom a high-spirited man might impute so much aggravated infamy ; yet not so many as the pride of envious minds is apt to suggest. For it is certain that the blandishments of rank and fortune do not so often in this, as in any of the other great countries of Europe, counteract the salutary influence of those feelings of duty which ought ever to attend such superiority. This may be the consequence not only of those peculiar circumstances which have already been stated, but also of that taste for *domestic life* which has long very honourably distinguished us as a moral people.— And certainly, whatever apprehensions may  
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justly be entertained from symptoms which seem to indicate that this virtuous disposition (the sure criterion of intrinsic worth) is on the decline, we have yet much reason to boast of a superior portion of its influence. It is still more general—less exclusively confined to the lower ranks of life in this than any other country of high refinement. For where are the rights and joys of *home* (that sound of British harmony which vibrates in perfect unison with the best and truest notes of happiness) so well secured? Where are the interesting relations of father, husband, son, and brother, preserved with such constancy of attachment? In what country are the soft and gentle beauties of the sex acknowledged with so much respect and tenderness? Where are they so little outraged by the tyranny of an affected and fullen superiority; or insulted by that whining gallantry which is still more expressive of arrogance and contempt? From our earliest days we are taught to consider them as our softer selves. We love them with a faithful and honest affection. Our  
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hearts swell with the generous delight of cherishing and protecting them, as the sweet companions whom nature has kindly given us to beguile the hour of anxiety, and bear with smiling patience more than half of all the ills of life. From this delightful source it is that the endearing ties of society are derived. They are perfect, as this is pure; and the idea of a common origin gives a warmth and tenderness to the friendships of family connection which endure for generations.

There are circumstances, besides, in our situation which make it reasonable to believe that we do, in fact, yet enjoy this enviable pre-eminence among nations. The substantial comforts of life are here more generally diffused among the people at large: industry is more honourable and various in its direction; and every man in the kingdom, be his rank what it may, has the means before him of employing his mind, and improving his fortune. Our insular situation too is favourable to the preservation of that open simplicity, those gene-

rous homespun opinions which stamp a value on the character of the people. It is delightful to observe that sentiment of self-respect which animates the honest countenance of a plain Englishman, while he exults in the idea that his countrymen are the best, the bravest, and the richest people upon earth—to mark that love of order and of justice ; that genuine untaught humanity and honour which scorns to strike the fallen man ; that fashion of fair-play which is the pride of every peasant.—But if all this be so : if these are circumstances which truly distinguish the internal state of things in this noble island : if the middle and ordinary ranks of people are more at their ease, and less liable to be infected by the importation of foreign vices : if there is less of that griping poverty which cramps all the feelings of many of the miserable gentry in other countries ; less of that inanity of mind and listlessness of manners which are the necessary attendants of idleness ; less of that frivolous levity, vicious dissipation, and pride,

or pompous affectation of indifference to the common blessings of nature, than in the sickly resorts of foreign grandeur ; and more of that leisure which regularity of employment and decency of habits must produce, we have here certainly the means of as much domestic felicity as is consistent with the mixed and chequered state of things in this world.

It is perhaps a proof of our taste for domestic life : of the manly and natural turn of our dispositions, that a character is here formed, in full perfection, which is hardly to be met with in any other part of the world.— I mean the true *independant country gentleman*.—And indeed there is something so ample, so amiable, and generous in the right confirmation of that character ; something so soundly liberal in the quality and duties which belong to it, that with justice the appellation has long conveyed the idea of the utmost extent of private worth and constitutional loyalty. The true country gentleman is none of the adventurers of the world. He is stationary  
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and permanent. His interests and the interests of all who live around him are immediately and perceptibly united. His connection with the country is bound fast by the strongest ties of property and of habit. He is the father of a district. His presence is the pride of his tenantry. They, and their families, and their dependants form their opinions upon his conduct and conversation ; and his hall is the court which governs their manners. By the practice of virtue he may earn the blessings, and secure the happiness of thousands. And the practice of virtue is encouraged by the circumstances of his situation. His objects may be great, but his views are simple. He is not distracted by a multitude of cares ; nor hurried away from the enjoyment of domestic happiness. His heart has full as much exercise as his head. The charities, the decencies, and the courtesies of life, are the duties he has to discharge. The attentions of hospitality extend the scope of his benevolence ; and much of what is

mercenary in his nature is lost for want of practice \*.

And indeed if the objects of a man's employment, and the means through which his wealth or support is derived, have an effect (as doubtless they have) on the turn and temper of his mind, the character of the country gentleman must, *in general*, possess more of intrinsic worth than any other in society. His employment has the noblest object that Nature (in the order of that progressive creation, by human agency, which is for ever going forward in the world) has entrusted to the care of man, viz. the improvement of her works for the production of those things which form the materials or support of all other modes of industry—the practice of a science as beautiful in its theory, as it is useful in its application. This is truly the country gentleman's

\* As I am but little accustomed to draw fictitious characters, I take my ideas on this subject from what I have had the happiness very intimately to know. In the country I have seen so much beneficence, both public and private, so well repaid by attachment and respect, that I can hardly set bounds to the salutary influence of such conduct over the manners of the people.

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profession. He earns no riches through the vices, the follies, or miseries of others; and his good is, immediately and directly, the good of individuals as well as of the country. With inducements, the most generous, to stimulate activity, his exertions are spontaneous and free. He is the master of his own time; the director of his own diligence: and his diligence is the exercise of health.—He may be the happiest, and ought to be the best and most independent of men.

If this interesting character, with the influence which naturally belongs to it (composing the true “pith of the nation”) should ever be lost—if it should be suffered to evaporate in the vile affectations of that mongrel breed of gentry, who betake themselves, for life, to the vapours of the town for relief from the enjoyments of the country—whose business it is to contract debts in folly, and bring disgrace on the station they would support, by dishonest delays of payment\*: or in the selfish indif-

\* I know not if there is any one thing in the whole circle of vitiated habits which compose the character of a mere *man*  
*of*



ference of those who may be denominated mere *estate-holders*; whose ideas of connection with the country, and those who live in it, amount to no more than the investment and security of their money in the land they have purchased; or the receipt of a certain interest by the hands of the attorney who *manages* their tenants.—If it should ever be the fashion to *improve* the hearty and hospitable manners of the country into an awkward imitation of refined and high-bred apathy—If the fraud and villainy of the gamester; the mercenary spirit of the land-jobber; or the political prostitutions of the factious partisan should displace the solid principles and wholesome habits of the virtuous and uncorrupted country gentleman, then indeed that saying, which no loss of distant possessions, no accumulation of foreign disaster can ever warrant,

*of the town* more destructive of all respect for the rank and manners of a gentleman in the eyes of the common people, or more pernicious to their morals, than this abandoned practice; which drives him of course into a state of dependence on his tradesmen; distresses many an industrious family, and furnishes the excuse of necessity for all the artifices of imposition.

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might too well apply—it might then be said with truth that “the sun of England’s glory  
“ was set for ever.”

Nor can it be forgotten that the manners and principles of the great mass of the people in the country are often *totally* dependent on the impressions they receive from those of their lay-superiors who reside among them. For it is too notorious that a *residing* or (as it may not improperly be expressed) an *effective* clergy is not every where to be met with. Nothing certainly is more lamentable than that gross and palpable desertion of a sacred duty which may be seen in the conduct of many individual members of the Church. Nothing can afford matter of more wonder to those who feel with that reverence which is due to so great and venerable an establishment. Where is the true spirit of ecclesiastical discipline, or *exemplary* promotion? Is it enough that my lords the Bishops are privately men of sanctity and good morals? that their charges to their clergy within their respective

dioceses are well composed, and well delivered: that they will not suffer any gross violation of decorum to pass unnoticed within their immediate observation: that the clergy themselves, collectively considered, with a view to the majority of their number, are a learned, valuable, and truly reverend body of men?—This is not enough. The exceptions are so numerous; and some of them display so much insolent disregard of all decent terms, even of compromise, with society, that religion is wounded in its vitals; and the Church deprived of its just influence in the cause of morality. It cannot be otherwise.—Shall the good man's sermon in support of the duties of subordination, or the conscientious virtue of pious habits, efface the strong impression which the idle and licentious worthlessness or oppressive baseness of some reverend profligate has imprinted in the minds of the people?—How is the poor curate, who toils and labours in rags for the lives of a starving family, and the dishonest ease of the bloated glutton, who lords it over him from some distant residence—

residence—how is this poor and abject man to procure or preserve the smallest portion of respect for an establishment which tolerates such humiliating and mischievous inequality : such detestable insensibility on the one hand ; such suffering and unmerited wretchedness on the other?—Oh ! it is an evil too monstrous for expression ; too flagrant for all patient consideration \* !

\* Neither the laws of the land, nor the canons of the Church, are here to blame. See the statute 21 Hen. 8. c. 13. “ For the more quiet and virtuous increase and maintenance “ of divine service, the preaching and teaching the word of “ God, *with godly and good example given*, the better discharge “ of curates, the maintenance of *hospitallity*, the relief of *poor “ people*, the increase of devotion and *good opinion of the lay-fee “ toward the spiritual persons :*”—and Lord Mansfield’s account of the evil intended to be remedied by that statute ; reported by Cowper (p. 431.) as follows: “ A clergyman with cure of “ souls is bound, not only by the canon law, but in conscience, to attend his duty in person, if he can. By experience it was found that neither conscience nor canon law “ were sufficient to bind the clergy to a due observance of “ their parochial duty ; but they left it to be done by poor “ curates hired at small salaries,” &c. See also the stat. 17 Geo. 3. c. 53. which was passed in consequence of the case reported in Cowper, for the purpose of taking away all pretence for non-residence ; the preamble of which is as follows : “ Whereas many of the parochial clergy, for want of “ proper habitations, are induced to reside at a distance from “ their benefices, by which means the parishioners lose the “ advantage of their *instruction and hospitallity*, which were great “ objects

It is indeed wonderful, that men of general good principles and upright conduct should ever fall into the total neglect of a duty which they are bound by so many sacred obligations to fulfil: it is strange, that they should deny themselves the happiness of discharging it. But the power and progress of that influence which fashion or general habit obtains, even on the leading sentiments of the mind, are truly astonishing. All the principles of a man are relaxed by the loss of any one of them. The whole character is unhinged, and disposed for the enjoyment of some further exemption. This is the case with individuals in

“ objects in the original distribution of tythes and glebes for “ the endowment of Churches.” Therefore the statute provides, that the incumbent may borrow money to build a proper house on the security of the benefice. How this important duty is still evaded, by the unwarrantable extension of a limited privilege, and how easily it might be enforced, need hardly be stated. Its vast importance to the happiness and peace of the people is sufficiently proved, by the sensible effects it never fails to produce, wherever it is faithfully fulfilled. In the whole circle of society, there is not a more interesting spectacle, a more beautiful display of active virtue, than is exhibited in the amiable and righteous discharge of clerical duty.

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all the private relations of life, and must, of course, be more perceptibly so, in whatever respects the manners of any body of men, or professional description of persons. Abuse or perversion steals on unperceived, while the reproach is diminished in proportion to the number it affects: it strikes at the whole, and hardly touches any one of its component parts. They are supported by the reverse of that sensation which stimulates and gives impulse to individual exertion, in all common or general efforts. Nothing, therefore, is more materially important to the welfare of society than the timely discouragement of whatever may tend to degrade the general character of great and privileged bodies of men: for nothing is more certain, than that man is prone to become whatever he is thought to be.

This leads me to say something on a subject with which I ought not to be unacquainted.



The Bar of England is, doubtless, one of the most honourable bodies of professional men in the world. It is honourable, from the talents which are necessary for the exercise of its duties; the education and the knowledge it requires; the pretensions and expectations it gives; but, above all, for the strength of that sentiment and integrity of mind, which, in the midst of temptations to be mean, can preserve the consciousness of a pure and steady character. Accordingly, there are always to be found, among that distinguished body, men of the best and most generous habits; whose situations in rank and estimation are pledges of their fidelity to those honourable duties which are exacted by confidence and respect. It is an avenue which may lead, not only to well-acquired wealth, but to greatness: and though all cannot arrive at such objects of ambition, yet those who fall short may at least have the consolation which the retrospect of a laudable and meritorious application

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tion of their minds, in an enlightened tract, must afford. They are the wiser and the better for that exertion. For what subject, in the whole circle of human affairs, has never become matter of discussion in a Court of Justice? What principle of morality; what extreme, or gradation, of virtue or of vice, has never been there the subject of observation? With this extensive exercise of liberal practice or reflection, the education and the *early habits* of every member of that respectable body, are supposed to correspond. This is the presumption—it is proved to be so by the form and manner of his admission. The laws by which he is received are a code of honour. He is received by the seniors of that society to which, as a student, he belongs, and in which his private character is understood to be known. A competent share of theoretical knowledge is presumed from the novitiate he has undergone: and no extent of talent, of learning, or of skill, will entitle him to his degree if

a stain is discovered \* on his honour. No Court can controul that discretion which says that his habits, his manners, or his general reputation are unfit for the station to which he aspires. It is a *forum domesticum*, which exclusively decides upon his pretensions, and confers that privilege of forensic independence which the common law of England has set up for the protection of the people. And well may it be thought, that the trust thus exercised is of the utmost importance to general welfare; for out of that body of men it is that his Majesty selects the highest Officer of the state, invested with all the power, splendor, and rank which follows the Great Seal of Great Britain; as well as that venerable Bench of independent Judges, whose fame for the impartial administration of justice has gone over the world. It is here that the manners, the habits, the accomplishments of the bar, extensive as their general influence must be over the ideas and

\* I say *discovered*; for it has happened (as it sometimes unavoidably must) that very improper persons have been received;—the instances, however, are but few.

opinions of the community at large, on subjects of the first importance: it is here that they bear upon the interests and happiness of the nation, on the very vitals of general welfare, with the strongest and most perceptible operation. It is not on the learning and skill with which law may be expounded and applied; or even the integrity with which justice may generally, and in substance, be administered, that those impressions of veneration and respect, which the People, to be happy, must entertain towards those who decide upon their property and their lives, will be found to depend: they rest upon manner as well as substance; on that which is formed by the habits of private life; on the attributes of a strong, a virtuous, and well-ordered mind; on the dignity of a mild, but steady deportment; on constancy of temper and patience of deliberation: in a word, on the science, the courage, the generous delicacy, and all the nameless duties of a gentleman.

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But if it shall ever happen that professional success may be insured by qualities the very reverse of those which belong to that character: if the student shall be taught to believe that the early receipt of fees (no matter how acquired) is the only true object of his ambition; if rules which have been established for the prevention, or restraint, of low and mercenary habits, are observed in form, but broken in substance: in short, if a sordid set of opinions and maxims shall be suffered to put out of countenance that honest pride of mind which would labour for future fame and well-earned distinction, there will then be an end of all honourable eminence in the law. The effect of such wretched degeneracy would soon be felt by every individual in the kingdom. It would then sufficiently appear, that the rules of a court will never ensure order; the emblems of authority, respect; or an act of parliament, independence.

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The gradual corruptions which insinuate themselves into the manners of a people must  
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have a time to ripen into the full maturity of mischief. They pass familiarly before our eyes, and grow up, without notice, from folly to vice ; from private ruin, to general destruction. They make no figure in the minds of men who are busied in the active scenes of life : or if they do, the subject is too general to give urgency to its pretensions. The disease is generating in the vitals of the state with an effect too much diffused over all for the immediate observation of particular symptoms. At length the shock of some public concussion, with the helping hand of bad ambition, brings it forward, in all the hideous forms of human wickedness.

And such has been the effect of that various and complicated vice, in mind and manners, which so long fermented in the very bowels of a miserable country, where the bands of society are now broken asunder, and a complete reversal has obtained of all the known principles and distinctions of human conduct.—Where virtue and vice have changed sides :

and that which hitherto, in all ages, and in all civilized countries, has been held to be the extreme of vice, is now inculcated as virtue, with the full sanction of public authority. It is dreadful there to observe how completely the heart of man may be divested of all tenderness ; to contemplate the arts and sciences (those sweeteners of the human mind) converted into instruments of brutal ferocity ; and all the purposes of a savage promoted by the studies of the philosopher\*.

—I content myself with this general reference to a phenomenon which now affords but little new matter of reflection either to the politician or the natural historian of man. Hitherto it has hung over the world as a meteor of mischief ; repelling, in its influence, whatever is good ; and attracting all that is bad in human composition : for ever varying

\* It is now a good many years since the idea of such a state of things was communicated, in an epistolary correspondence with a friend, by one whose name is a title of virtue, and the honours of his rank the slightest appendage of his worth. It was then only considered as an ingenious scheme of possibilities.



in its shape and form: of an aspect less fiery, for the present, than that which it has usually assumed; but still portentous of blood, and future calamity to mankind.

It is consolatory to think (as it cannot surely be doubted) that national character has its basis in one of the original varieties of nature. A certain peculiarity of lineament, of feature, and complexion, is observable in every country under heaven. Even districts of a country, when they are distinguished by strong-marked local boundaries, are also to be traced by a close and attentive observation of their inhabitants. And surely it is not a strained analogy to maintain, that certain corresponding differences must also prevail in the structure of the mind. We know not the lines of connection; nor is it possible for human discernment to pronounce upon the character of the mind from the structure of the body.—It is a dangerous conceit to think otherwise; and cannot be made conducive to the practical



benefit of society.—But a general application of the analogy, to prove the existence of a distinct tendency of nature or disposition among the greater part of a people, is of decisive consequence in many important questions of general policy and legislation. It confirms the position, which experience suggests, that all is relative in this world:—that schemes of government and of law which are wise in one country, would often be downright folly in another.

But even here we may trust too much to the strength of national character. A people are never stationary. They are either rising or falling in the general scale of manners and public virtue. We have here our mobs; composed of all ranks of persons.—We have also our flatterers of mobs—men who would declaim against the obsequiousness of courts, and yet practice a species of adulation a thousand times more base. It is more base in proportion as it is more mischievous and dishonest. The flattery of a courtier is

dissolved in air: it amounts to no more than an established and familiar formula; addressed, in general, to those who hear it but as a sound, and can answer it in terms of equal insignificance. But this is not so with that part of a mob which is composed of the simple and unsuspecting among the lower ranks of the people. Their orator becomes their idol. They believe him to be their friend. They listen to his vile and hackneyed protestations, as the effusions of sincerity and regard: and thank him, by acclamation, for seducing them from their labour and tranquillity; and teaching them to believe that they are an oppressed and unhappy people—They thank him for a boon which, for aught he can tell, may involve many a poor family in misery. The man who, for purposes of ambition, can thus *deliberately* practise upon all that is honest and right in the natural frame of uncultivated minds;—of what villainy, *were it well masked*, would he not be capable?

Nor are we, after all, without practices in the ordinary course of life which cannot fail in time, (if they are not counteracted by some virtuous and honourable fashion,) to debase all that is just and generous in our private character. The worst of them are produced by an *excessive* avidity for gain; and the pressure of that artificial necessity which a vicious dissipation, or a total, and often affected, disregard of œconomy must inevitably create. For how shall we otherwise account for the endurance of that vile, low, levelling species of labour: that disgusting contrast to all that is innocently gay or exhilarating in manners: that exercise of every mean or angry passion: that vice which now threatens to extirpate all taste or capacity for rational or enlivening conversation; all discrimination of character, or selection of society—that *gaming* profligacy which poisons so many sources of private happiness? Through all the various ranks of male and female gamblers; from the hollow-eyed  
haggard

haggard of fashion, to the pilfering shop-boy, the prevalence of this painful and dishonest occupation may be traced to the lowest principles of depravity.

There is not, indeed, any one thing in which we so much resemble the worst of our neighbours, in their worst state of private vice, as in the encouragement which is given, by those who regulate our manners, to this most productive mischief. Let no man despair of finding his way into the *best company* if he do but play. The vilest adventurer that ever met the scorn of an honourable man is there welcomed with favour and distinction, on that condition: a condition well suited to the low cast of his nature, or the dishonest misery of his habits. But it were well if the evil were confined within the walls of a gaming-house; or the habitations of those necessitous persons in high life, whose hand-bills are every where to be found, announcing their nights of business. It has at length made its way to the inmost recesses of  
private

private society ; and supplants the best blessings of middle life.—The affected imitations of monied vulgarism are now too mischievous to be ridiculous. They issue annually from our watering-places—those Lazarettos for the diseased in mind ; the giddy, the frivolous, and the vicious—those Colleges for the reception, and seasonable support of all the male and female swindlers of Great Britain and Ireland. The fresh breezes of the sea are now charged with the steams of every species of infection ; and all the charms of the country become subservient to the vices of the town, and the purposes of debauchery—that debauchery of the mind which sickens at the view of retirement, and the cheerful sobriety of simple and unaffected manners.

But whatever may be the true extent of influence which such evils have already acquired in the interior of high and middle life, it is certain that the lower ranks of the people will ever be neglected or abused  
exactly

exactly in proportion to the decline of principle and right sentiment among their superiors. The mutual and reciprocal dependencies of society are forgotten or unknown; and the soundest equality of right and of law will be found insufficient for the purposes of general tranquillity.—We may boast, and with truth, that the peasants and labourers of this country are the best in Europe. Their health and happiness are the true strength of the nation. Their habits of thinking, I repeat, are the basis of its security. But they will think as they feel—and no arguments or manifestos can convince them that they are not oppressed or abused, if the wants of industrious indigence are overlooked by the rich; and their respect for superior rank is repaid by indifference, or rejected with insolence. Such things are to be seen.—Those sordid or arrogant upstarts in wealth, who know not how to be gentlemen, and would frown themselves into importance, are not the least



formidable foes which this country has to fear.

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There are many who will now think that I have consumed enough of time and of paper in writing about nothing—for so they will account my subject. They will not, I fear, ascribe to it any immediate connection with Politics: and every body will agree that it has none whatever with Party. I have written upon private manners for public purposes. But such subjects are not now in fashion: and nothing is more likely than that this little Essay will fall “dead-born from the press.”—Yet in the earlier part of the present century (that period of proverbial eminence in English literature) it was the favourite occupation of a leisure hour among men of the first distinction; Peers as well as Commoners; Statesmen as well as private persons; to compose, or assist in the composition of essays on practical Ethics; on the virtues of ordinary life.

They



They inculcated duties which all the world acknowledged; and exerted their best talents in communicating ideas which certainly were not new. But they rightly thought, that impressions of moral truth, which the immediate interests of men do not always suggest, will soon decay, if they are not refreshed by frequent repetition. We have, all of us, been the better for their exercises;—without them we should have heard but little of the British Classics: and those characteristical virtues which (somewhat proudly perhaps) I have ascribed to my country, might not now have been the subject of exultation.

For myself, I will not obtrude my apologies.—I have written with a conscientiousness which satisfies my own mind; and am not without hopes (yet not too confidently entertained) that something of what I have said may prove to be useful.

THE END.









